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N E W S C O N F E R E N C E

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:36 A.M. EDT

JUNE 19, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President came to the office at 7:40 and had a series of staff meetings.

At 8:50, he went into the Cabinet Room where he had a meeting with a number of Members of the House. The subject of the meeting was the President's often stated desire to have the limitations on American aid to Turkey lifted. The meeting was requested by some of the Members who attended.

The meeting was considered to be constructive. It was aimed at finding a solution to this parliamentary matter.

The meeting was taken up with exploring ways to solve the matter, and the President intends to continue to work with Members of the House to have the restrictions on Turkish aid lifted.

Q Have you announced the names of the Congressmen?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether we have or not. The Members are the following Members of the House: Brademas, of Indiana; Hamilton, of Indiana; Cassell, of Florida; Rosenthal, of New York; Sarbanes, of Maryland, who are all Democrats; and Whalen, of Ohio, who is a Republican.

Q May I ask you a question about that?

MR. NESSEN: Sure.

Q What did you mean by the use of the word "parliamentary" to describe the situation?

MR. NESSEN: Legislative, perhaps, is a better word.

Q Was Ambassador Macomber there?

MR. NESSEN: I did not see Ambassador Macomber.

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Q Did they give any encouragement that they might be able to break this deadlock?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it was constructive, and I think I probably couldn't characterize it beyond that.

Q Ron, did you say it was at the President's request, or their request?

MR. NESSEN: No, I said some of the Members had asked for it.

Q Could you say when the request was made?

MR. NESSEN: Let's see, he told me this morning -- a while back.

Q Several days?

MR. NESSEN: At least several days, if not before that.

Q Was it as a result of the Turkish Government 30-day moratorium?

MR. NESSEN: That inserted some urgency into the meeting, Peter.

Q I mean the request for the meeting.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the exact date when it was organized, but it was several days ago, at least several days ago.

Q Was there any reason this was not on the public press schedule today?

MR. NESSEN: The feeling by the Members, which is shared by the President, is that on some matters, and especially a sensitive matter, that the meeting could be better conducted and would turn out to be more productive if it was not announced in advance. Although, it is obviously being announced.

Q What is the logic? It baffles me why an announcement of a meeting being held would inhibit the meeting. I don't understand that.

MR. NESSEN: As I say, it was the view of the Members, and the President shares it in this case, and in some other cases the meeting can be more productive.

Q Is this going to be the new policy on so-called private meetings -- they will be announced after the fact?

MR. NESSEN: Sometimes.

Q You mean after the participants have left so we do not have the opportunity to interview them as they come out? Is that the purpose?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Well, is that the effect?

Q Is it the view of Max Friedersdorf and/or John Marsh; did they have anything to do with it?

MR. NESSEN: They certainly did.

Q Is it their advice to the President that leads him to that view?

MR. NESSEN: In this case, it was the feeling of the Members. I am sure that Max Friedersdorf and Jack on occasion do feel that meetings on sensitive issues can be more productive when not announced in advance.

Q Is this politically sensitive to them so that they would be embarrassed to be coming in here? Is that what you are talking about?

MR. NESSEN: I think you would have to ask the Members that, Tom.

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Q How long did the meeting last?

MR. NESSEN: I thought I said from 8:50 to 10:22.

Q Again, for the second consecutive day, I would like to issue a serious protest against this policy.

MR. NESSEN: It is noted.

Q Ron, in your mind, what could be the possible effect of this policy other than to prevent us from being here and talking to these participants after they leave the meeting? Can you tell us what other effects this policy could have other than that?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, I wonder if we could keep this in a little perspective since it is the second day we have gone around on it. Not to my personal knowledge, but I suspect that Presidents have had private meetings unannounced perhaps going back to George Washington.

I do think that this White House has a good record of not only announcing meetings that the President has, keeping you informed of his activities, but something that I am told by some of you out there has not been done before, which is quite detailed reports on the meetings with quotes from participants and so forth. So, I think our record is good.

This is not a new policy, either just starting now under this President or brought in by this President. Presidents do have private meetings because on some matters they believe that they can be more productive when conducted privately.

I think you know that a good number of these private meetings are with you and your colleagues, and I think, as I said to Bob yesterday, perhaps it was unfair to point out the Cronkite meeting, but apparently Cronkite felt it would be more productive for him to meet the President without a public announcement.

He met a writer yesterday that felt it would be more productive to not have it announced ahead of time. He has another writer coming in this afternoon. I don't mean to leave the impression that all private meetings are with writers, but many are, and I think they have their reasons for wanting to keep it private, and some of the President's other guests have their reasons.

I do think we have to keep it a little bit in perspective.

Q Ron, we pointed out yesterday these newspaper-men and news media people, Cronkite and others, who have had private meetings with the President are not paid by the taxpayers and their function can, in no sense, be considered a public function accountable to taxpayers, so there are those of us who do not accept your analogy or your rationalization.

But, I would like to ask, be that as it may, I would like to ask this question: It seems that in recent days this policy you talked about a minute ago of extensive reports of meetings, frequently with quotes, the things that you have been doing earlier in your tenure has now pretty well turned around and instead of getting reports on meetings such as, for instance, the meeting with the Bishops yesterday, which you were unprepared to give us a report on --

MR. NESSEN: Because I didn't attend. Just let's straighten it out. I didn't attend the meeting because it coincided with my briefing. But Jim Cavanaugh who did attend the meeting, did come out and brief.

Q I am aware of that, but you had been doing this during your briefing before, giving us fairly extensive reports on meetings.

Q Can you give us a detailed report on this meeting?

MR. NESSEN: I did not attend the meeting.

Q I am wondering why it is during the last few days there has been several of these private meetings, and several meetings on which reports were not given at all or not given in a timely fashion?

MR. NESSEN: Jim, there has been no change, and, of course, we continue to give full reports, with quotes, on Presidential meetings. There also will continue to be private meetings.

We wasted a good deal of time yesterday and delayed what I think most of you thought was some important news while we haggled over these things.

I am willing to do it, but I don't believe we are going to get anywhere at it because the President is going to continue as all Presidents have -- to have private meetings.

Q Does he still maintain through you that he is conducting an open Administration?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The phrase he used so many times in the beginning --

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q -- is this Rumsfeld's decision?

MR. NESSEN: Which decision are you referring to?

Q By having meetings that are not previously announced.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think Rumsfeld had any control over the Nixon Administration, the Johnson Administration, the Kennedy Administration, Roosevelt, Truman, Hoover, Coolidge, and so forth.

Q I am asking about this one.

MR. NESSEN: No, he did not. It was the President's desire.

Q Could you tell us the difference between a private meeting and a secret meeting, Ron, since you used the word.

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Les.

Q You can't. In other words, it is perfectly accurate and reasonable for us to describe this as a policy of secret meetings at the White House?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't dare try to tell you how to write your stories, Les.

Q That wasn't my question. I want to ask you, as a former White House correspondent, do you think it is reasonable to describe these as secret meetings?

MR. NESSEN: I wouldn't judge the reasonableness of your words, Les.

Q Was Secretary Kissinger in the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. Ambassador Macomber was not.

Q Have we asked you, Ron, what the President's feelings are, or his reaction to the Turkish ultimatum, this announcement by the Turkish Government that they had plans ready for closing some of these bases or for taking some action with respect to these bases?

MR. NESSEN: No, I don't think you have until this moment, but I think one thing is that the Turkish announcement, I believe, indicated that they would prefer negotiations to open in 30 days if the aid was not resumed.

I think you know what the President feels about the Turkish aid cut-off. I said that publicly before, that he feels it is harmful not only to a Cyprus settlement, but harmful to the relation with an ally who occupies an important place in NATO.

I think he doesn't understand why Congress would penalize an ally while the stated purpose of the cut-off, which was to move the Cyprus negotiations along, has not been fulfilled and, in fact, may have been set back.

The President was pleased when the Senate repealed the aid cut-off, and he believes the House ought to take early action on this to remove it. So, I think his views are well known.

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Q I am trying to take it from a slightly different point of view; not the cutoff by Congress, but rather the statement by the Turkish Government. Let me put it this way: Does the President believe something can be worked out within that 30 days in order -- does he believe there will be negotiations within 30 days, as requested by the Turkish Government?

MR. NESSEN: He is hopeful the House will repeal the aid cutoff as the Senate did, and that would eliminate the need to begin negotiations on the bases.

Q If it doesn't, will we begin the negotiations?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the United States has its bases -- every foreign country where the United States has bases, it is there at the invitation and through negotiations with that government. So it is Turkey's call.

Q Ron, the meeting is extraordinarily long.

MR. NESSEN: It is an extraordinarily complex subject.

Q Since the Congressmen requested the meeting, not the President, it seems there must have been some matters the Congress wanted to raise with the President concerning some sort of a movement. Could you give us any more detail on how the meeting was constructed?

MR. NESSEN: No, I can't.

Q How long was the meeting?

MR. NESSEN: For the third time, it lasted from 8:50 to 10:22.

Q Was the President encouraged?

MR. NESSEN: The words used to describe the meeting are the ones that I would like to leave it at.

Q Does the President believe that private industry should be allowed to manufacture and sell enriched uranium?

MR. NESSEN: Carroll, why don't we go through the announcements. There may be something of interest to you in there, as there was yesterday.

Q Before you go on, just for clarification, what is the purpose of not announcing a meeting before a meeting occurs, but then announcing it afterwards and discussing it? What is the difference? I don't quite understand that difference.

MR. NESSEN: As I said, on some occasions, after meetings have been held, they will be announced and sometimes they won't.

Q What I don't understand is why it was felt that it would be more productive not to announce the meeting in advance, but then to announce it when it was finished?

MR. NESSEN: The Members felt it would be more productive not to announce it ahead of time. Obviously, once the Members had come and held their meeting -- and it was well known that they had been here and held their meeting -- it was decided an announcement could then not in any way interfere with the productivity of the meeting.

Q Which Members said they thought it would be more productive?

MR. NESSEN: For precisely who, I think you need to talk to Max or Jack. I didn't get into that much detail of it.

Q Did a lot of these Members feel if the meeting was announced their colleagues would be beating down their doors?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot speak for the Members.

At 11:00, the President began one of his periodic Congressional hours. I think you know what they are. Congressmen come in for brief meetings with the President. They sometimes bring along constituents and so forth.

Q Could you tell us who was here today?

MR. NESSEN: There was a total of eight Members of Congress -- or there will be by the time the hour is over -- and it is posted.

Q There is a list of nine. Senator Mike Mansfield is included in the nine.

MR. NESSEN: No, Scott came in twice on two separate matters. (Laughter)

The reason I want to push on is there is an event at 12:30 in the Rose Garden, which you might want to attend. The President will greet participants of the National Teen-Age Republican Leadership Conference. These young people are in Washington for a week-long series of meetings. There are about 200 youngsters. The President will speak to them. The greeting is open for full press coverage.

If you want to know a bit more about them, there are around the country 130,000 Teen-Age Republicans, age 13 to 19. They belong to 8,000 clubs. They are not affiliated with the Republican National Committee. They are under the direction of Miss Barbara Wells, and are financed solely through private contributions. They run various programs, such as a stop drug campaign.

The President met with the National Leadership Conference last year when he was Vice President, and met with them before when he was Republican leader of the House.

Q How many are here this morning?

MR. NESSEN: 200, as I said before.

Q Will there be a text, or off the cuff?

MR. NESSEN: Off the cuff.

Q I know you don't like to talk about political matters, but do you know if the President plans to make great use of teenagers, as former President Nixon did? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: I think that is one of those matters that hasn't been settled yet.

Q I wonder if I could ask a general house-keeping question.

MR. NESSEN: Of course.

Q The UPI reported a detailed account of a former White House staffer's recollections of skinny-dipping in the old White House pool. I wonder if this alleged inside information was considered in the decision to have an outside rather than an inside pool? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It wasn't, Les.

Q It wasn't? Was it known in the White House about this?

MR. NESSEN: I have no way of knowing.

Q Have you finished your announcements?

MR. NESSEN: No, I have not.

At 2:00, the Vice President will be in for his regular meeting with the President. They do meet regularly, and I don't have the agenda for this meeting.

At 4:00, as we said yesterday, the President will meet Secretary General Luns, of the North Atlantic Council, and with the permanent representatives of the North Atlantic Council.

Q Will that be a substantive meeting? They met in Brussels a few weeks ago, so is this a courtesy call on their way back from Monterey?

MR. NESSEN: He invited them to come here when he met with Secretary General Luns in February. They will also be attending a symposium at Annapolis. I don't have, frankly, what the substance of the meeting is, other than the fact that it reflects the President's interests in keeping in close touch with the members of the Atlantic Alliance.

Q Will it be a long or short meeting?

MR. NESSEN: The meeting is scheduled for an hour, so it would be in the area of a long meeting. That is at 4:00.

We will hand out some announcements, as soon as this is over, of the President's intention to nominate Abner Woodruff Sibal, of McLean, Virginia, to be General Counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He succeeds William A. Carey, who resigned on March 19.

The President has signed an Executive Order delegating to the Administrator of the GSA the authority to issue joint funding regulations of which I know nothing, and John Carlson knows everything, so John will help you with that afterwards.

At long last we have the Olympic Sports Commission. There is a statement by the President -- quite lengthy and explanatory -- an Executive Order which creates the Commission, a fact sheet, an announcement of the 14 persons being named to the President's Commission on Olympic Sports, and a phone number of the Executive Director, Michael Harrigan, from the song of the same name. He is Executive Director. His phone number is 254-8410, and he will be opening offices at 2120 L Street, Northwest.

There has been considerable interest in this over the months, and it is finally being done and that gentleman can give you more details.

Q As far as the names, will they be given to us here?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, this is all prepared. The four pieces of paper will be handed out after the briefing.

In answer to Carroll's question, Carroll asked about Phil's story on the nuclear enrichment program. The President has spent some time on the question of nuclear enrichment in the past couple of weeks. It is a very important question, and perhaps it hasn't been given as much attention as it should. It is a complicated and complex subject, but it is also a very important subject.

The President is making his decisions on a number of options as to how to increase the production of enriched uranium for use in nuclear power plants within the next two weeks, at the latest. When he has made his choice among the options, we will be announcing it.

I think one purpose served by Phil's story is that it did indicate the importance of this and we will be providing a lot of information in the next few weeks on this subject; and when the President has completed making his choices we will announce his decision.

Q Ron, what is the President's reaction to Mr. Brezhnev's suggestions for the beginning of an East-West summit in Helsinki, on July 22? Has he received that message, which others have received?

MR. NESSEN: I made a quick check this morning and could not confirm there had been such a communication, but regardless of whether there has, the views on the European summit meeting and its timing and probability of the President going, and then the timing of the Brezhnev visit, just simply remain unchanged.

Q Was any date mentioned in the Brezhnev communique to the President yesterday when the Soviet Housing Minister came? Was that part of the message?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, if I may pursue that, what is his reaction to a suggestion of July 22?

MR. NESSEN: Exactly the same as it has been.

Q You are referring to your statement made here a couple of days ago?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

Q Ron, does the President intend to ask Congress to take action to prevent a nationwide rail strike next week?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that is a somewhat premature question.

Just to give you a little background, on April 16 the President appointed an emergency board to investigate and report on the dispute. The President got that report and he gave it to the parties in the dispute on May 23.

Now, the reason I say your question is premature is that discussions and negotiations are continuing and the President is hopeful that the dispute can be resolved through the collective bargaining process. The President has assigned Mr. Usery, of the National Mediation Board, and he is meeting with the parties.

As you know, Bill Usery is the Special Assistant to the President for Labor Management Negotiations. He is regularly meeting with the parties, and I think it is just premature, since they are in discussions and negotiations.

Q Ron, both sides are preparing for a strike.

MR. NESSEN: It may well be, Russ, but they are discussing and negotiating the matter, and it has not reached the point where anything other than Mr. Usery's help appears to be needed.

Q Ron, can you tell us what has happened to the plebiscite in Mariannas?

MR. NESSEN: Well, the President is very gratified with the results of this act, which is an act of self-determination. The next step will be to submit a covenant to Congress recommending the Congressional approval of the plebiscite results through a joint resolution.

Then, once Congress has done that, the President will have the authority to begin the gradual and progressive implementations of the covenant. It will take some time to carry it out.

I do have the name of someone who can give you further information on this. His name is Mr. Barry, of the Department of Interior, or the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations. Mr. Barry's office is 343-7561, and the Office of the Micronesian Status Negotiations is 343-9143.

Q Ron, is there anything new on the housing bill?

MR. NESSEN: On the housing bill, the President has until the 24th of June to make a decision, and we don't have anything to announce.

Q Is there anything on the crime bill?

MR. NESSEN: On the crime bill, the President is taking a personal role in writing the message. He worked on it some this morning, and he worked on it some last night. He is not satisfied yet that it is worded precisely the way he wants to word it, and he is working on it during the day today. When it is finished, which could be today but may not be today, we will go ahead and announce it and have briefings and so forth.

Q Will he discuss in the crime message, do you know, Ron, the issue of the death penalty?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall whether he does or not, Les.

Q Ron, just for guidance, would you say it probably will not be today?

MR. NESSEN: I just don't have yet the feeling of how close he is to finishing it. I do know he worked on it this morning.

Q What is the earliest?

MR. NESSEN: I would say after this we could give a lid until 3:00 and have a better idea at that time.

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Q Ron, Ralph mentioned the Brezhnev message about the European security meeting. That is a very complicated topic. It is also a very long time. Has the President had a detailed briefing on it? Does he really know where those issues are?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, because it was discussed in some detail in Brussels.

Q But a lot has happened since that time.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I know, but he keeps up with what is going on.

Q In running down the President's schedule, a few minutes ago, did you mention the Attorney General coming in at 12:15?

MR. NESSEN: No, the Attorney General is not coming in at 12:15.

Q Has that meeting been cancelled?

MR. NESSEN: It has been postponed until the President has put his crime message in the form that he wants it in.

Q Ron, what is the plan? Will Levi come here to brief when it is finally put together?

MR. NESSEN: That is the plan, yes.

Q Do you think the President will speak to us on it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Do you have anything new on the Middle East assessment, other than the fact, of course, that our Ambassador to Egypt is here? Can you project a date, can you tell us what is holding it up? Can you project a date?

MR. NESSEN: I can't project a date, but I want to remind you the Foreign Minister of Syria, Mr. Khaddam, is coming here tomorrow to talk with the President and the Secretary of State. He will meet with the President tomorrow at 4 o'clock.

The United States invited President Assad of Syria to send a representative to Washington to discuss the Middle East situation, and this is in response to that American invitation.

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The visit of the Foreign Minister will enable the President to get a firsthand assessment of Syria's views as part of the policy reassessment.

The President has met the Foreign Minister before, about a year ago, or a little less than a year ago. He is going to renew that, but obviously the reassessment cannot be completed at least until he has had that meeting.

I cannot project a date for you.

Q Ron, I don't think you answered Carroll Kilpatrick's question; that is, has the President decided to ask for legislation to allow the production and sale of enriched uranium by private industry?

MR. NESSEN: I said he is choosing his options now, making his choices, and when he has made his choices, we will announce them.

Q Does that mean he has not decided?

MR. NESSEN: He is deciding.

Q Has he decided on that particular point?

MR. NESSEN: It is a complex issue, Ted, as you see from reading Phil's story, and as you will see when we begin our briefings, it involves a great deal more than a simple yes or no.

I think it is something we will be talking about and thinking about a lot in the future, and it is not right to begin it with a simplistic yes or no because a whole range of options have to be decided.

Q Excuse me. Then are you denying Phil's story?

MR. NESSEN: I am simply saying when the President has made all his decisions, we will announce them.

Q Then you are not denying the story?

MR. NESSEN: I am saying when the President makes all of his decisions, we will announce them.

Q Ron, can you answer my question, please? On Dave Packard, can you confirm him and can you tell us the status of the President's committee?

MR. NESSEN: I think I can say that the papers will not be filed today, which means they will be filed tomorrow.

As I said, there is no secret that Mr. Packard will play a role in the President's campaign.

Q How about Mr. Chamberlain?

MR. NESSEN: What about Mr. Chamberlain?

Q As campaign treasurer?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly wouldn't think in that direction, if I were you.

Q Ron, could I ask, to go back to what you termed a haggle, who was it that informed you that the Congressmen who met with the President this morning wanted the meeting secret?

MR. NESSEN: The President indicated that the Members had indicated to him that they preferred a private meeting with the President.

Q The President indicated that to you?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, has a name been selected for the campaign committee yet?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Are you saying that Chamberlain is not going to be the treasurer?

MR. NESSEN: Frank asked me, "What about Chamberlain?" I said, "What about him?" He said, "Chamberlain as treasurer." I said, "I wouldn't think in that direction, if I were you."

Q Ron, Dean Burch is quoted as saying that the President will announce his candidacy on television about the time Bo Callaway takes over as chairman of the committee. What is the status of the President's decision?

MR. NESSEN: The precise date and place has not been decided yet, but I think we said yesterday it will be in the next several weeks. We said Bo will take over in the next several weeks, so in that sense, they could vaguely coincide, but the date for the President's announcement has not been set.

Q Would that announcement presumably come before he goes out and starts making political speeches?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know because I don't know what political speeches he is going to make, and I don't know when he is going to announce them.

Q I am told he is going on a stumping trip early in July.

Q Do you have any other news?

MR. NESSEN: No, I think that is about it for today.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 12:09 P.M. EDT)